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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: ANOTHER NEW FACE IN THE PROVINCES,  
MARIBOR'S MAYOR HAS WORLD CLASS PLANS

¶1. (U) Summary. Maribor, Slovenia's second city situated in the northeast, voted Franc Kangler of the Slovene People's Party (SLS) into office in the October 2006 elections. After 47 days in office, he is confident he can meet 70% of his campaign promises by the end of this year. Kangler spent 10 years in parliament, but after next month's parliamentary session, he will hand off his national duties to focus full time on his municipal obligations. Among his goals are to revitalize the Maribor airport and bring in international flights, increase tourism -- particularly from the United States, and reorganize the city bureaucracy. Kangler is also lobbying to have Maribor elected a European Cultural Capital for 2013. Longer term and more ambitious goals include building two skyscrapers in Maribor of at least 50-60 stories (a la NYC Twin Towers). In a country with no building more than 20 stories high, this will be a real feat to pull off. End Summary.

¶2. (U) With the goal of strengthening U.S. ties to regions outside the capital, and as part of two day visit to the region January 25-26, COM met with newly installed Mayor of Maribor, Franc Kangler to discuss his economic revitalization plans and potential for U.S. trade and investment. Joining Kangler was Deputy Mayor Danilo Bornac of the Slovene Democratic Party (SDS). Kangler also has deputy mayors from the Social Democratic (SD) party and the Slovene National Party (SNS).

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Revitalizing the Economy  
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3.(U) Kangler is focused on revitalizing Maribor,s economy by developing its largely dormant airport, expanding a nearby business park and taking advantage of EU funds to attract more science and technology research and development to his region. Kangler believes Maribor can take better advantage of its natural resources to develop tourism. He seemed particularly interested in attracting U.S. investors and tourists, saying the U.S. tourist was a high quality tourist (i.e. spends money).

¶4. (U) An important piece of Kangler,s plan for the Maribor airport is the creation of a logistics hub. With its central location - 2.5 hours from Vienna, 2.5 hours from Slovenia,s port of Koper and as a gateway to the Western Balkans - he should be able to realize this plan. Kangler also said that he was authorized to offer an incentive of 120,000 Euros to

any airline (passenger or cargo) wishing to open a connection with Maribor.

15. (U) COM highlighted for Kangler the strong cultural relationship the Embassy has developed with Maribor over the years and our desire to see that continue to grow. Based on our experience, Maribor should have a good shot at becoming a European cultural capital. Other links between the U.S. and Maribor that COM encouraged Kangler to nurture are the sister city relationship with Pueblo, Colorado, student exchanges, and those commercial contacts such as Office One, that already exist. On developing the market for U.S. tourists, COM suggested that Kangler develop a plan to benefit from the Harrah's entertainment deal currently under negotiation. Capitalizing on Slovenia's small size and excellent highways, it should be possible to attract those clients to enjoy the advantages of the Maribor region as well.

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Putting Maribor on the Map  
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16. (U) Over dinner, Kangler expanded on his desire to build Slovenia's first modern skyscraper(s). He says he has identified the location and plans to meet with a well-known architect from Vienna - Boris Podreca - to discuss the feasibility of this sort of construction in Maribor. Kangler envisions the complex to be not only a business center but a tourist attraction as well on the lines of Paris' Eiffel Tour and London' Millennium Wheel. Kangler also described his desire to build two memorials in Maribor. One would be to victims of terrorism. He said he had written of his plans to former President Clinton, Russian President Putin and Slovenian President Drnovsek. Only Drnovsek failed to respond. Former gymnastics champion, Leon Stukelj, who died in 1999 just short of his 101st birthday, is Kangler's idol, and he would like to create a memorial to him, as well, in

Maribor.

17. (SBU) Comment. Maribor's new mayor has a vision for revitalizing the city, and he appears to have the energy to realize his goals. Though some of his plans are grandiose and likely to meet with resistance (skyscrapers) from the public, it is clear he is looking for a way for Maribor to make its mark and become a "must see" place for the tourist and a "can do" location for business. His years as a member of Parliament and extensive travel as a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, are assets that will help him to expand the horizons of this charming, provincial city in Slovenia's heartland. End Comment.  
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